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SUBJECT: PERU: CRISIS OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES

REF: LIMA 4744

Sensitive but Unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Peru's national parties suffered an electoral drubbing during the November 19 regional/municipal elections. President Garcia's APRA party, Ollanta Humala's Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP), Union for Peru (UPP), and Unidad Nacional (UN) all demonstrated a manifest lack of national appeal. Independent parties and local movements claimed the majority of regional presidencies and provincial capitals. Most Peruvians do not identify with any specific party, and the electorate's continued volatility suggests the ease with which another Humala-like outsider could arise from the regions. To strengthen its democracy, Peru needs political parties that better represent public interests. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Peru's traditional parties lost control of the political map in the November 19 regional and municipal elections. The APRA, which claimed 12 regional presidencies in 2002, came away with only 2 (La Libertad and Piura) this time around. At the same time, Humala's PNP failed to capture a single regional presidency and won only one provincial capital (Arequipa). (Even there the winner has much closer ties to the local community than to the party, ref.) The UPP, the PNP's former coalition partner, won only one regional presidency, in Cusco. Finally, the UN won the mayoral seat in Lima and 24 of Lima's 41 districts but failed to capture a single office outside the capital.

¶3. (SBU) Collapsed faith in the traditional parties combined with low barriers to entry for new parties produced a plethora of local candidates and many new office holders whose appeal and reach are narrowly circumscribed. Independent parties and local social movements won 21 of the 25 regional presidencies, most of the provincial capitals, and a host of local offices. The raft of locally-based winners reflects voters' preferences for candidates they perceive as closer to their interests rather than more distant influences.

¶4. (SBU) Unfortunately, local leaders are no guarantee of good leadership. Many of those elected are new to politics, and the abundance of local candidates -- an average of 9 candidates for each regional presidency -- has ensured that few candidates can claim a strong mandate to govern. Independent regional presidents, for example, won with an average of only 31% of the vote, and several with far less than that. Moreover, while local movements may promote new

faces, the absence of strong national parties translates into a lack of national-level consensus-building mechanisms for forging larger-scale policies. An additional danger is that competing caudillos may play only to their constituents, and even seek to undermine central government policies for short-term political gain. As one analyst put it, some of these new leaders are clearly more interested in creating than in resolving conflict.

Comment: Rebuilding Peru's Parties

15. (SBU) Peru's established parties are weak and lack national reach. The winners in the November municipal/regional elections were locally known candidates who latched on to regional/local movements. To strengthen a key pillar of its democratic system, Peru needs to develop efficient, transparent national-level parties that can better channel public interests, respond to public demands, and resist the infiltration of narco-candidates. For the moment, while APRA continues to hold strong influence in the national political arena, populist regional leaders will be eager to exploit regional conflicts and government shortcomings, real and perceived, and to offer themselves as an alternative to the present administration -- just as Humala did in 2005.

16. (SBU) USAID plans to develop an initiative to strengthen political parties and expand their reach. The program would fortify the capacity of parties to represent citizens better and to govern more effectively. End Comment.

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